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L E T T E R

TO HER GRACE THE

D U C H E S S

OF

D E V O N S H I R E.

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PLEAS'D WITH A FEATHER, TICKLED WITH A STRAW.

POPE.

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L O N D O N:

Printed for FIELDING and WALKER, No. 20, Pater-noster-Row.  
MDCCLXXVII.

LETTER

TO HER GRACE THE

DUCHESS

DEVONSHIRE



LONDON

Printed for J. & W. G. & Co. by J. & W. G. & Co.



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L E T T E R, &c.

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MADAM,

**T**HE noblest Inheritance which the Inhabitants of this Country have received from their Ancestors, is the Liberty of the Press. It is this which checks the hand of the Tyrant, when Morality and Religion have lost their influence. It is this which, by the downfall it threatens and has often effected, damps the aspirings of the potent villain. But though its more bitter severities are, in general, levelled

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at the corrupt Statesman, he ought not to be its only object. Every Character whose Follies may be the means of mischief to Society, deserves reproof and chastisement; and while I leave to the Men the department of political examination, and the vices of their own sex, I shall avail myself of the privilege which the Press affords me, to hold forth the examples of Female Error which are so glaring a disgrace to the times wherein we live. The power which has sometimes restrained the darings of Ambition, and exposed the designs of Treason, may, perhaps, give a temporary check to insulting Fashion.

To be the first Priestess in the Temple of this capricious Deity, seems to be the principal object of Your Grace's wishes; and to dispense its Oracles to the submissive Multitude, is an office to which the duties of your character and station are a willing sacrifice.

WHEN you began to breathe from the hurry which must have accompanied your marriage with the DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE, and to turn your thoughts to the character you ought to support in the world; it was rather singular, that among the many parts of importance and dignity which solicited your choice, you should fix upon one so trifling in its nature,  
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and so unworthy your rank and understanding, as the Dispenser of Fashions, and the Genius of Pleasure. Much allowance, it is true, should be made for your youth and inexperience; and some consideration is due to the effects of a sudden transition from the restraints of Childhood to the liberty of a Married Woman. To escape from the care of maternal vigilance, and to enjoy the unlimited indulgence of an Husband; to exchange the insipidity and subordination of a Nursery, for the splendors and command of a Palace; to hear your Beauty praised and your Graces displayed by the croud of Fops who surrounded you, and whose character you could not as yet be supposed to comprehend; were circumstances, I must acknowledge, more than sufficient to inspire a heart, young and inexperienced as yours, with an unguarded vanity. To find yourself, as it were, by enchantment, in the highest rank of Nobility, and with the command of a fortune scarcely equalled in the Kingdom, might be expected to operate, for some short time, against the sober rules of rigid discretion.

BUT it was imagined that this delirium would be shortly over, and that the uncommon attention which your most excellent Mother paid to your education, would soon produce the fruits of Prudence and Consideration; and that your

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Understanding, cultivated with so much care, would soon resume the composure which had been so greatly interrupted, and exercise itself in the display of Virtues that would add to the dignity of your rank, and render you the first Female Object in these kingdoms of Applause and Imitation.

Your elevated station held you forth to the particular observation of mankind: and as you never appeared in the world until you were DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE, the curiosity of many was kept awake to behold a Phenomenon of Innocence and Simplicity, which report had described you to be. The wise and the prudent were happy in the expectation of your appearance to erect a standard of Virtue, where the few who dared to act in opposition to fashionable excesses, might find a protection. The modish Fools of the *other* Sex, though they derived some hopes from your youth, were rather apprehensive that they should not attract your notice, or receive your smiles. But the fashionable Fools of your own were not so diffident. They had no apprehensions that you would be lost to the Pleasurable World in the enjoyment of domestic pleasures, and the display of real dignity. They had been corrupted, and were well qualified to exercise, with assured success, the arts of Corruption upon others. It was not their interest to have a pattern of good sense



sense and propriety in the first rank of Nobility to contrast with themselves. Besides, it was very natural, that with all their insensibility to the censure of the World, they should use their utmost endeavours to bring forwards a Character, who, the moment it was betrayed into Levity and Imprudence, would attract that odium which had so long rested upon them. I do not give you my opinion of their success, nor shall I tell you the general opinion of the world; I hope Your Grace has something in your own breast which contradicts them both.

THERE is nothing, I must confess, so flattering to human nature as to direct and give laws to others. To be the Head of a Party in Politics, a Faction in Civil Government, or a Sect in Religion, has been thought such an envied pre-eminence, that many have endeavoured to maintain the delusive situation at the hazard of life's most solid advantages, and even of life itself. But where Rank and Fortune produce an allowed superiority of station, and which, accompanied by some degree of prudence, would become of very extensive and beneficial influence; to throw away real consequence for that which arises from being the directress of a fashion, is degradation indeed: And to derive importance upon daring to adopt Absurdities which the



inferior classes are almost afraid to imitate, is a weakness, which gives to fools a cause of triumph, and to the wise a subject for commiseration.

YOUR Grace is one of the first Women in this kingdom in rank, fortune, and beauty; so that you could have no real temptation to depart from that dignity which should be inseparable from you, under a foolish notion which misleads so many,—of acquiring importance. The former gives you the most flattering precedence; the second obtains for you whatever money can procure; and the third commands that admiration which is the grand object of all, but which, in reality, is obtained by so few of your sex.

PARTICULARITY of dress, therefore, was not necessary to distinguish you, nor to improve those charms which, when unadorned, are, in the language of the Poet, *adorned the most*. And as it was more than probable that, from Your Grace's distinction and beauty, your taste in dress would, in a great measure, influence the Female World, you had an opportunity of giving an example of that chaste elegance which would have heightened your own charms, and corrected the extravagance of others.---You possessed the power of curbing folly or enlarging its dominion,---and you chose the latter,

PLEAS'D WITH A FEATHER, TICKLED WITH A STRAW.

I really



I really did not intend to recal the idea of that preposterous Plumage which was, at once, the ornament of your head, and the emblem of yourself. But as the subject has fallen, accidentally, before me,---I shall not pass it by without an observation.

If I had been in those circumstances of life which would have qualified me for a friendly acquaintance with Your Grace, and I had, by chance, heard a declaration of your design to adopt these feathery ornaments,---I should have taken the liberty of offering to your attention something like the following historical remonstrance. I should have informed you that Poets, Orators, and even the sacred Writers have ever employed the image of a Feather to represent Levity, Vanity, and Folly; That a Plume is the ornament which waves over the baby brow of Infancy; and, stepping at once from the cradle to the grave, that it nods amid the honours of funeral magnificence, adorns the hearse, and trembles over the bier. I should also have solicited your attention to the Bird whose spoils you were about to wear. I should have told Your Grace, that the Ostrich is remarkable for being a foolish bird, and that its insensibility is particularly known by its total destitution of that tenderness which almost

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all Animals discover for their young ; an account whereof, it might be imagined, must occasion very sensible emotions in her breast who already *is*, or feels a wish that she *may* one day be, a Mother : “ *She drops her Eggs in the sand.*”---But as the Bible may not be a popular Book with Your Grace, I shall make the quotation as palatable as possible, by presenting it to you in the beautiful paraphrase of the late excellent and celebrated Dr. YOUNG. Describing the *Ostrich*, he proceeds as follows :

While far she flies, her scatter'd Eggs are found,  
Without an owner, on the sandy ground :  
Cast out on fortune, they at mercy lie,  
And borrow Life from an inclement sky :  
Adopted by the Sun, in blaze of day,  
They ripen under her prolific ray.  
Unmindful she---that some unhappy tread  
May crush her Young in their neglected bed.

WHAT effect these observations might have had, I know not:---but I fear, if some flattering tongue had informed you, at the same time, that the Plumes also crowned the Helmet of the Warrior *armed for conquest*,---they would have been quickly forgotten.

BUT



BUT as if this ornament, childish in itself, and ridiculous in its enormity, did not sufficiently mark and determine the levity of your Character, you must have recourse to the garb of Childhood, and appear in the most public Assemblies in the dress of the Nursery.---Shall I guess at the motive which induced you to adopt this absurdity; or shall I suppose that you acted from a spirit of consistency, and adapted your dress to your conduct? If this was the case, I should hope that the sense of propriety may grow upon you; and that while you preserve this appearance of the childish state---you will practise its submissions, and preserve its innocence.

As you had no temptation to adopt an absurd mode of personal decoration, you could neither be impelled, by any excusable motive, to rush at once into the extreme of Dissipation.---You were not, like some new-married women, to enjoy a few months of London, and then bid adieu to it for years. You are not in their situation, who, from the precarious nature of their circumstances, are resolved to enjoy the world while they possess the means of enjoying it. It is not to be supposed that you have experienced any dullness or inattention in the Duke your

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Husband,

Husband, or that insipidity in domestic society which some women plead as an excuse for sacrificing the whole of their time to public engagements: and yet, with every probable means of enjoying every thing throughout your life, you seem to be superseding the pleasures of future years;---and with the most entire power of erecting a firm fabric of domestic happiness, you chuse your residence in the gawdy, unsubstantial Temples of Pleasure, where Syrens warble forth the notes of Delusion, to charm the unwary into those flowery paths which lead to the caverns of Dishonour.

It may appear singular in me to wish you were proud: but a just Pride is the source of every important and noble action; and even where it deviates into an haughtiness of demeanour, is not unassociated with some great and useful qualities. If your Pride had rendered you imperious, it would have preserved you from levity: and though it might have made you less familiar with your inferiors, it would have prevented many persons of your own rank from being ashamed of you. It might, indeed, have increased your reserve; but, at the same time, it would have occasioned your being more considerate. Under its influence you might, perhaps, sometimes overstrain the  
dignity



dignity of your station; but, at the same time, you would be sensible that dignity belonged to it, and ought to be supported.---As a proud Woman, you, most certainly, would not be free from errors;---but they would not be the errors of a thoughtless mind. You might then, perhaps, be too much attached to form and punctilios; but that is a state far preferable to a total absence of all restraint.---In short, you would have had it in your power to exercise the spirit of condescension, and the relaxations of your formality would not have degraded you.

THE influence of Vanity, and which, I fear, is the influence that governs Your Grace, is of a very different nature, and more dangerous tendency. It leads to every thing that is mean, trifling, and frivolous; and when once the mind and character are habituated to such pursuits, the difficulty of returning to objects of consequence and dignity is almost insuperable. Pride oftentimes leads to Independence; but Vanity is the veriest Beggar that ever asked an alms. It has already rendered you dependant upon that Crowd, which as yet attends your public appearance; from their attention you derive your happiness; and the gaze

gaze of the vulgar eye administers importance to the  
DUCHESS OF DEVONSHIRE.

I SHALL not, at present, enlarge on the efficacy of example; and how they of high station are bound to consider the model of conduct they hold forth to the inferior world. I shall only observe, that these times stand in particular need of virtuous example among Women of Rank and Distinction. There never was a period when Prudence and Decorum stood in greater need of assistance and protection than the present:---and bad as the times are, I doubt not but you might have established a mode of conduct, which would have been truly honourable to yourself, and productive of a very diffusive good.

WHILE I write, Madam, with freedom of your present demeanour, I encourage hopes, that you will soon discover how much you have mistaken the road to Happiness and Dignity. May the blessed moment soon arrive which is destined to unveil the Phantom that deceives you. It cannot come too soon, as the effects of your example may survive the example itself; and your past levities be quoted as authority, when your future prudence shall condemn them; and your wisdom, as far as it relates to yourself, make ample amends for your folly.

THERE



THERE are many motives which continually awaken the recollection of the more enlightened part of mankind; and though a course of levity and dissipation may for a time suspend them, they seldom fail to operate at last, and resume some degree of influence over every breast in which they have been carefully impressed by an attentive education. But bad example generally extends its pernicious effects to those, who, not having had these advantages, do not bear in their breasts the antidote to them; and owe to the practice of their superiors, that they continue under their influence to the end of their lives.

YOUR Grace's education was, if I am rightly informed, conducted in a manner which at once displayed the affection and wisdom of your noble Parents. The fond vigilance which continually hovered over your intellectual as well as external accomplishments, seemed almost to preclude a possibility of any material deviation from the path of decorum; and I doubt not, though you are at present rather a discouragement to the watchful circumspection of Parents to their Daughters, the time will come, when the seeds sown in the Nursery, however they may have been checked in their growth, will spring up, and produce the fairest fruits of Virtue.

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To call your attention to that fortunate period, let me now ask Your Grace, and may the question pass on to your heart, *If you are happy?* Do the triumphs over reason and good-sense in giving, or, at least, sanctifying a grotesque Fashion to the imitative Multitude, afford you any real pleasure? Does Content sit smiling at your heart? Or does a loud, playful gaiety deceive you into a belief that you are contented? When the day is past, and you prepare for repose, Do you find comfort upon your pillow? and when the morning comes, Do you awake to Gladness?

It is not only the good opinion of mankind which Your Grace will forfeit by the levity of your manners; your health will also suffer. Fashionable Pleasures are the foes of Beauty; and great and rich as you may be, where will be your comforts when the novelty of your appearance is over, and the Crowd no longer gaze? When wealth is lost, every sensual satisfaction will be lost with it: Pleasures will then no longer please; Beauty will be spoiled of its attractions; and the Butterflies will have taken their flight to some new-blown flower, while you are forsaken by all but those Parasites who are the disgraceful appendages of Greatness.

If



IF magnificence charms you, be magnificent! Your rank and fortune will justify the propensity: and if a minute attention to personal decoration and the parade of equipage were to yield to the true objects of generous magnificence, the relief of Distress, the encouragement of Arts, and the patronage of Genius, it would raise you to an higher degree of elevation than Kings have in their power to bestow.

THIS Age, in particular, offers to Your Grace a singular and most happy means of distinguishing your beneficence, in holding forth to your Patronage so many of your own Sex who are eminent in almost every branch of Art, Science, and Literature. To preside over, encourage and protect the Female Genius of your Country, would be a situation so honourable to Yourself, so beneficial to the Community, and, what, perhaps, would be more alluring, so replete with novelty, that one would think it impossible such a pre-eminence should not be desired by you. Haste then to attain it! and lay aside that Levity which though Youth and Beauty may for a short time render graceful, has began already to fade upon the eyes of your most professed admirers.

You

You may laugh at public opinion, and make your boast of an insensibility which disgraces the human heart. But be assured, Madam, that the laugh will be returned loud enough to reach you, elevated as you are, and bear a stinging mortification along with it, from which your insensibility cannot protect you. The good sense of Mankind, in spite of bad examples, is not entirely exhausted; and if the Great deserve contempt,---Birth, Title, and Fortune, nay Royalty itself, will not preserve them from frequent and incontestible assurances that they are thought contemptible.

I have the Honour of being,

Madam,

Your Grace's sincere Friend,

And obedient humble Servant,

F I N I S





